

# LETTERS *to the Editor*

## School Health-History Forms

*To the Editor:* I read Dr. Smilkstein's article in the April 1969 issue of CALIFORNIA MEDICINE—"School Health-History Forms"—with considerable interest as I have been encouraging revision of those used in our school system. Our high school nurses, in many instances, feel our health inventories are a waste of their time.

Since we don't do routine examinations in our schools and do not get requested health examination reports for many of our students entering junior and senior high schools, I am in agreement with the author regarding the value of a good health inventory. However, I am afraid the use of a form such as Dr. Smilkstein suggests would be entirely unsatisfactory in an urban school system such as ours where the reading level of a large population is below average and high school biology is an elective subject. The assistance of a school nurse or science teacher would be required to answer many of the questions. Without this assistance the answers would be completely unreliable.

If the school population where Dr. Smilkstein works is either average or above average scholastically, it would be interesting to try the suggested inventory and to determine how valid and worthwhile such a questionnaire would be. I would suggest, however, that if it is to be used in urban school districts that the language be drastically changed, particularly if help cannot be provided by a nurse or teacher to assist pupils in completing the questionnaire.

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## And the Author Replies

I have been given the opportunity to read your [Dr. Leah L. Hirsch's] letter of June 12, 1969 in which you comment on the "School Health History Form."

I must suggest that you underestimate the capabilities of our secondary school students. I shared your concern regarding the language in the form. Prior to the completion of my paper the suggested health history form was given to teenagers in the Upward Bound Program sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity in Claremont. These youngsters are from socio-economically depressed areas (Blacks and Chicanos) and they completed the forms with little trouble. The School Health History Form gave us an excellent view of the health picture of this group.

It is not expected that the students should understand all terms (Osgood-Schlatters for example). It is expected that those students who have had exposure to a given illness or injury would recognize and mark the item on the form.

In our concern for a satisfactory inventory we must not lose sight of the fact that our present health evaluation in California leaves much to be desired. I would vote for a conference to develop an ideal statewide form.

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